

Stolen

Money and My Sight

By Kevin M. Stack, AD2, USNR (Ret.)

I had been a flight engineer on P-3s for 10 years, when I was sent to a four-week, flight-engineer school in Marietta, Ga., to transition from P-3s to C-130s.

After a day of studying procedures and responsibilities, a classmate of mine and I went to a pub for dinner. There, we met a few local military guys and started sharing sea stories. A few hours later, my classmate left, but I was enjoying playing darts with my new-found friends, so I didn't leave with him. After a few pints of ale, my game started going downhill, and I was getting really tired. I left the bar and sat in my rental car in the parking lot to catch a few winks. Since the car wasn't far from the front door of the pub, I thought I would be fine. I was wrong.

The sound of breaking glass woke me up. It was someone breaking the passenger-side window. He demanded my money. I was still not quite awake when I saw him reach into the car and unlock my doors with the electronic lock. Then a second man opened the door on my side and pulled me out of the car. I was trying to get my footing when he also demanded my money.

Being a married Sailor and having spent the evening at the pub, I was just about broke. I yelled that to my attacker, who immediately hit me on the side of my head with something solid, probably his gun. The next thing I knew, I was lying on the ground and watching the men run away while they were going through my wallet.

I managed to get to my feet and go back to the pub. The bartender was just locking up when he saw me and let me inside. He called police and paramedics.

After I was in the hospital, I realized exactly what had happened to me. The left side of my face

had been crushed. My eye socket and cheekbone had been re-arranged. Doctors had to put three one-inch metal plates to reconstruct my eye socket and to reposition my cheekbone. Today, my eye looks normal, but it isn't. One of the bones had damaged my optic nerve and left me blind in my left eye. Unless doctors find a way to repair damaged optic nerves, my blindness is permanent.

After the incident, I had all kinds of help from people I didn't even know. The bartender thought the classmate I had been with earlier was staying at the same hotel I was, but he was at a different one. However, they did find another Navy man staying at my hotel. Not knowing me or exactly what happened, this shipmate came to my aid. He notified my command, took care of the rental car, and made sure I had everything I needed while I was in the hospital. My wife's squadron (she is also on active duty) flew her out so she could be by my side, and NAS Atlanta started all the paperwork to quickly get me home.

Back in California. I was medically discharged with 12 years of service. People tell me that I'm taking the loss of vision in one of my eyes pretty well, but I realize that I could have lost far more. At least, I am alive and still have my family.

The buddy system would have worked for me if my buddy and I had stayed together. We weren't in a foreign port. We were right in the U.S.—where it seems like overkill to stick with a buddy. Believe me, it's not. All those cliches I've heard since boot camp—"There's strength in numbers." "Look out for your shipmate." "Use the buddy system."—are repeated for a reason. If I had followed them, I would still be in the Navy, instead of being medically retired. 